

## Common Garden Millipedes

There are many species of millipedes. The one encountered by people most often is the common garden millipede (*Oxidus gracilis*). In late spring or early summer, homes are often invaded by these millipedes, possibly due to heavy rains and a rising water table which forces them out onto carports and driveways.



Common garden millipede.  
Rachel Rowe. Clemson University.

Millipedes are not insects. They are in the Diplopoda class, which means “two footed”. Most body segments of millipedes have two pairs of legs. The garden millipede is a brownish-black color measuring about  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch long and  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch wide. When millipedes are disturbed, they will usually curl up into a “C” shape. They are not poisonous; however, when handled they can release an offensive smelling liquid that is capable of causing small blisters.

Millipedes prefer to live in moist areas with high humidity, such as under large rocks, wood piles, mulch and in turfgrass with excessive thatch. They can also be found living in gutters and trees. Millipedes are most active at night and feed primarily on dead plant material. However, they can feed on living plant material during dry periods.

Their presence often goes undetected until a heavy rain causes them to migrate in large numbers. They may also migrate during periods of drought to find a moist area to live. Due to their small size they can easily enter homes through cracks and crevices. The good news is that they usually do not survive more than a few days indoors unless a moist habitat and food source are available.



Common garden millipede curled into a “C” shape.  
Rachel Rowe. Clemson University.

### Control

Chemical controls alone are not effective at reducing millipede populations. Follow these steps to reduce moisture in the landscape and deter millipedes.

**Dethatch Lawns:** Millipedes thrive in dense thatch layers. Thatch consists of sloughed off plant material which builds up over time creating a layer between the soil and leaf blades. To learn more about thatch in the lawn and how to reduce it, see [HGIC 2360, Controlling Thatch in Lawns](#).

**Mow Lawns Closely:** Keep lawns mowed at the recommended height to encourage quick drying after irrigation and heavy dew. For more

information on the proper mowing height for each turf species, see [HGIC 1205, \*Mowing Lawns\*](#).

**Remove Debris:** Reduce wood debris, rocks, heavy mulch, leaf piles and firewood in the landscape. Because millipedes can inhabit compost piles, site piles further from the house. These areas provide a moist environment for millipedes.

**Water Lawns in the Early Morning Hours:** Irrigating a lawn in the early morning hours will allow it to dry more quickly. For more information on watering lawns, see [HGIC 1207, \*Watering Lawns\*](#).

**Good Fitting Door Seals:** Check the seal beneath all exterior doors for a tight fit.

For more information see [EHS/HS-18 \*Millipedes\*](#).

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